



RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE SILENT WHATSAPP MESSAGES: FROM DISAPPOINTMENT TO THE JOY OF RECONNECTION THROUGH SMALL RESPONSES

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ABSTRACT

On the morning of 19 July 2025, I experienced an emotional episode sparked by the silence of my former and current students in our WhatsApp group. After sharing a personal article, a reflection developed over two decades, I found only four out of seventeen students responded. This silence led me to question whether I had misjudged the bond I believed I had with them. The emotions deepened when I recalled the muted responses I received after sharing about my mother's passing. This article documents that raw experience—from my first reactions, thoughts about dismantling the group, to the overwhelming wave of responses that later poured in. These student replies—tantalizing, reflective, and educative—restored my faith in why I continue to share. In this piece, I express my internal dialogue with honesty, revisit every response with gratitude, and offer reflections on mentorship, vulnerability, and the simple power of a reply.

KEYWORDS

student engagement, academic reflection, mentorship, emotional response, WhatsApp communication.

1. INTRODUCTION: MY WILL, MY EMOTION, MY POSITION

On the morning of 19 July 2025, I felt that I were in my will and in my emotion, and in my position to mitigate and to control—and most important—to educate myself and all those in the WhatsApp group of the significance of responses to anyone's messages, especially those messages that go without replies.

Of course, I can understand why those never responded before. Maybe they are busy. Maybe they don't know what to say. Maybe silence is their comfort zone. But when I shared my reflection article (Yap, 2025)—a piece I took 20 years to finally write—I only got four responses. I felt disappointed. I felt sad. I felt, in my own words, "locked in a desperator."

This emotional dissonance, though personal, is not isolated. Research shows that in WhatsApp-based academic environments, non-responses often affect both student and educator well-being, creating a sense of disconnect despite the platform's intended purpose of building community (Bano et al., 2019). WhatsApp is widely acknowledged as a tool that enhances out-of-class communication, peer bonding, and academic reflection when used actively and meaningfully (Elhay and Hershkovitz, 2019; Stone and Logan, 2018). However, the lack of interaction—especially in emotional or personal contexts—can generate feelings of invisibility and emotional fatigue, particularly for educators who consistently engage (Motaung and Dube, 2020; Valero-Anco et al., 2024).

I asked myself: was I wrong to share? Did my enthusiasm annoy others? I even considered shutting down the group. Maybe then they won't be annoyed with my "angkut bakul" (carrying of my own basket) behaviour or the act of self-praise or self-promotion. WhatsApp as a communication tool brings this paradox: its flexibility and immediacy encourage engagement, yet the same qualities can overwhelm or distance users when expectations are unmet (Jabbar et al., 2021; Rabotapi and Matope, 2024).

But then I remembered something deeper. These students, all 17 of them, are not just names in a contact list. They are my students. Some graduated, some still working under me, one a postdoctoral researcher. I care about

them. I shared not to show off and self-praise, but because I want them to see, to learn, to continue walking the academic journey—even when they've left the classroom.

Indeed, studies have emphasized that continued digital mentoring and post-course connection through WhatsApp can foster long-term academic growth, emotional resilience, and professional identity (Gómez-Arteta et al., 2022; Hershkovitz et al., 2019). WhatsApp, when used constructively, can become more than a platform—it can become a community of learning, encouragement, and enduring mentorship (Konyana and Modise, 2024; Durgungoz and Durgungoz, 2022). And then something unexpected happened—one by one, they started replying. And their words broke me. In a good way.

2. THE RESPONSES THAT MOVED MY HEART

These are not just messages. These are voices that reassured me. Some apologized. Some explained. Some expressed pride. Some poured their gratitude. Each word, each sentence, was a thread that stitched back the fabric of connection I thought had been lost. However, three students (IS, NOR and AZ) were non-responsive on the same day due to daily hectic routine work (and need a break) but they had been responsive to all my messages previously.

Below are the reflections from the hearts of my students (both current and former):

1. AD

"You are doing a very wonderful job, Prof. Your posts are always motivational. Please keep them coming as always. Good morning."

A simple but uplifting message. A reminder that even one sentence can make a mentor feel seen.

2. IR

"I would like to sincerely apologize for not responding to the article you shared... Thank you for always guiding us and sharing your knowledge... we

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really do value your dedication. We're always looking into your sharing of valuable knowledge Prof 🙏."

Her sincerity and humility carry the tone of someone who knows the worth of a teacher's time.

3. AQ

"Despite the silentness, I enjoy reading all of your article 🌟🌟 That was a unique article I've been reading in all my life... To us, you are a good teacher and guider... We appreciate all of your sharings, it benefit all of us until now."

This touched me deeply. A reminder that even when students don't respond, they remember and reflect.

4. MA

"It is good to know that you love sharing here... I didn't mean to upset you Prof... I'm proud to have you as our former lecturer, supervisor and a great teacher :)"

"Please don't leave Prof... When your name pops out I would be excited to say 'Hey, that's my Prof.'"

This response made me smile. She reminded me that our legacies don't fade—they ripple.

5. FA

"Only a few lecturers/supervisors would deem to put their time to interact with their students outside the allocated office hours... and the few is you, Prof. We appreciate all you have done for us Prof 🙏 ... I'll be more active in this group from now on 🤝."

Here is validation that connection matters more than office doors or class schedules.

6. AM

"I realize I haven't been very responsive... I've always appreciated the way you share your thoughts, greetings, and even simple moments like your meals... I'll do my best to engage more consistently from now on."

Even such everyday acknowledgments matter. The small things—greetings and meals—bring warmth.

7. AU

"It is definitely grateful to have you as supervisor... I still have the thought of continuing a research study under your guidance, as I see it rare and precious."

These words affirm what every educating professor hopes for—continued trust and the desire to learn more.

8. IZ

"Please don't do this Prof. Keep doing & sharing whatever you have in mind. The supports are always around & won't be taken for granted 🙏🤝."

Short but powerful. Reassurance in uncertain moments can give new breath to perseverance.

9. TI

"A nice reflection of course... Your works keep us motivated. I believe the nonresponse of some people did not take you out of their minds."

Wisdom in few words. Even silence can contain admiration.

10. JA

"I still take a look at recent publications from this group... As your recent publication talks about how the flame endures, I hope you endure past the silence."

A poetic reminder that endurance is our shared torch.

11. BA

"Most times, it is the same articles you post that we gain techniques from to write our own papers..."

Closing the group would be tantamount to starving us of knowledge, Prof."

Here lies the true purpose of the group—nourishment.

12. DA

"I really appreciate everything you've done for us not just during class but even after... Please don't shut down the group 😊 ... we still read and value

what you share here."

"Sorry once again Prof 🙏"

Sometimes all we need to hear is: "We still value you." And he said it best.

13. MO

"I actually appreciate that you share your achievement with us. I even sometimes read some of them. Not many lecturers would take the time like you do to connect with students. Next time I will be more active."

He reminded me it's not about self-glory—it's about connection and continuity.

14. ZA

"I admit I haven't really caught up to any recent events here... I work all 7 days so I really can't find time to sit down and read... I will try my best to engage more and read more recent stuff from now."

His honesty touched me. His struggle reflects so many who want to respond but feel too worn down.

3. FIRST REFLECTION: WHY THE SILENCE HURTS

I never shared my reflections or research because I wanted applause. I shared them because I care. I share because I want to keep educating—even if my classroom is now a group chat, and even if I'm speaking into digital silence.

When I shared the death of my mother, I needed more than a condolence—I needed presence. When I shared a lifetime reflection article, I needed acknowledgement, not validation. I realize now that sometimes, people care but don't know how to show it. Some read, and quietly appreciate. Others only respond when they realize how much you've been waiting.

But for someone like me—so human, so emotional—it's hard not to feel hurt. I wear my heart on my sleeve. I speak with hope. I connect with full presence. And when silence returns, it cuts.

The non-responses I encountered in WhatsApp are not isolated emotional reactions. In fact, scholarly works have highlighted how non-responses in WhatsApp groups can lead to feelings of neglect, isolation, or emotional disconnection among participants (Bano et al., 2019). For educators who continually reach out—especially those who share personal or reflective content—a lack of feedback can severely impact their emotional well-being and perceived value within the learning community (Motaung and Dube, 2020).

This is not merely about unmet expectations—it's about emotional labor. As one study notes, non-responses in academic messaging platforms like WhatsApp may cause educators and students alike to question relational dynamics, especially when the intent is deeply reflective or personal (Bano et al., 2019).

But today I learned that behind the silence were hearts still beating for this connection. I am reminded that a simple "thank you," a few kind words, or just a reply can mean the world to someone like me. I now better understand that student engagement, even through a simple "like" or short response, affirms not only the relevance of what is shared, but the human behind the message (Elhay and Hershkovitz, 2019; Valero-Ancco et al., 2024).

4. SECOND REFLECTION: WHY I WILL STILL CONTINUE SHARING

I may be a perfectionist. I may sometimes expect too much. But it is only because I still care deeply. I believe in the power of education not just to teach, but to touch, to build, and to bridge gaps across time and distance.

Today, my heart was broken. And then it was healed again—by all of you.

This group is more than WhatsApp. It is a living community, a space of informal mentorship, and a medium of digital companionship. Numerous studies have affirmed that WhatsApp is more than a messaging platform—it is a powerful tool of academic mentoring and emotional scaffolding, especially in post-course relationships (Gómez-Arteta et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2023).

To those students who replied with warmth, remorse, and pride—you have justified the power of reflective communication and informal mentorship through this platform. You showed that students value continuity beyond graduation, and that digital tools like WhatsApp can maintain bonds that are human and transformative (Hershkovitz et al., 2019; Valero-Ancco et al., 2024).

In many contexts, WhatsApp enhances the flexibility of academic

reflection, enabling asynchronous engagement with students' thoughts and allowing timely responses to emotional and academic needs (Yoke, 2023; Baguma et al. 2019; Konyana and Modise, 2024). Even when some students feel overwhelmed by constant connectivity, when used with care, it strengthens mentorship and builds resilience in learning networks (Jabbar et al., 2021; Rabotapi and Matope, 2024).

So, I will continue to share—not because I expect a standing ovation—but because the act of sharing itself is an extension of mentorship. And if even one person reads, reflects, or silently carries that learning forward—that is enough.

5. CONCLUSION: A REMINDER FOR US ALL

So here I am—still with my will, still with my emotions, still in my position as an educating professor academically. I forgive the silence. I embrace the late replies. I appreciate the apologies, the pride, the honesty, and the rekindled connection.

To those who responded—you reminded me that words heal.

To those who stayed quiet—I understand now that silence doesn't mean absence.

To myself—I will continue.

Let this article be a reminder for us all:

Respond when it matters. Show up. Even small words can lift our heavy hearts. And for educating professors like me, remember—to educate is to endure.

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